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Aero Pelican may plug Rex gaps
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A Newcastle-based airline is considering plugging the gaps left by Regional Express (Rex) pulling out of six western New South Wales communities.

Rex is axing its Air Link services from Dubbo to Bourke, Cobar, Coonamble, Lightning Ridge, and Walgett, as well as Mudgee to Sydney next month.

But the Member for Orange, Russell Turner, says Aero Pelican has told him it is investigating the feasibility of taking on the routes.

"We're not saying that they will ultimately take them all on, but we're quite confident," he said.

"They sounded very confident yesterday that they're very keen to try and put air facilities back into those towns.

"But we've got no undertaking at this stage that they will take them all on or that they can get landing slots in Sydney Airport.

"There's a lot of negotiations to go on yet."

The Federal Opposition's transport spokesman, Warren Truss, says it will be difficult for a new operator because it will not be eligible for the en route rebate which is being phased out by 2010.

Mr Truss, who is visiting Dubbo and Coonamble today, is calling on the Government to review its decision to remove the rebate that helps about 40 regional operators.

Meanwhile, top level talks to try to avert the planned closure of Air Link services between Mudgee and Sydney have failed.

The general manager of the Mid Western Regional Council, Warwick Bennett, met the head of Rex last night.

"[He said] the flights to Mudgee will definitely cease on the 20th of December. There is no opportunity to continue with them under the Air Link banner," he said.

"The issue for him is pilot shortage. There just simply are not the pilots about to fly these smaller aircraft, although the aircraft they are using out of Mudgee are becoming obsolete and difficult to maintain," he said.

Mr Bennett says he is meeting Brindabella Airlines in Canberra today about the possibility of it flying into Mudgee.